

STATINTL

If Hue Falls, So May Thieu, Says 1 Report

Saigon, May 8 (Special)—The State Department's intelligence agency has concluded that the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu faces collapse if the city of Hue falls to the Communists, it was learned today.

Reliable sources disclosed that the conclusion was contained in a top-level evaluation prepared by Intelligence and Research, the analysis branch of the State Department.

The evaluation said the future of the Thieu government hinged on the ability of South Vietnamese troops to hold on to Hue in the face of an anticipated attempt by North Vietnamese forces to overrun the city, 400 miles north of Saigon.

The adverse effects, both military and psychological, of a Communist victory at Hue, the report concluded, could topple the Thieu regime.

The intelligence unit draws on information provided

through the State Department and other channels. It is one of several United States intelligence and evaluation organizations, and its conclusions do not necessarily reflect those of other bodies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency.

Earlier it was learned that the United States mission here, in a report to the State Department, denoted a wavering in the morale of South Vietnam's armed forces in the wake of recent military setbacks.

Underscoring the crucial situation at Hue, Thieu flew yesterday to the menaced city for the second time in four days to confer with his newly named area commander, Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, and other senior commanders.

Thieu said he was "very confident about the whole situation."

—Joseph Fried

Capitol Punishment

What the President Knows

By Art Buchwald

I guess it would be an understatement to say that things are not going as well in Indochina as the President planned. Most Americans are quite confused about it and are wondering why.

I was, too, until I spoke to my friend Kaminsky in a bar the other night.

Kaminsky raised a frightening thought when he said, "The Americans have always assumed that the President of the United States has information at his disposal that the rest of us don't."

"Of course," I said. "Everyone knows that."

"Well, suppose he doesn't? Suppose the President doesn't know any more about what is going on than we do?"

"That's impossible, Kaminsky," I said. "The President knows secrets that none of us would dream of."

"We like to think that," he replied. "But suppose what he knows is wrong?"

"It can't be wrong. The President has every source of information in this country available to him, from the CIA to the Pentagon; to the embassy in Saigon. Their reports don't lie."

"Well, how do you explain the President's assurances for the past three and a half years that Vietnamization was working?"

"It was working when he said it was working. It just isn't working too well now. You can't expect Vietnamization to work all the time."

"But suppose the reports the President read were overly optimistic to make the people in the field look good? How would the President know the truth?"

"No one would do that," I protested. "They know the President relies on that information to make far-reaching decisions."

"True, but have you ever heard of a President getting a pessimistic report from Indochina?"

"Not until recently," I admitted. "Kaminsky, you are making me very nervous."

"I ain't being critical of the President," Kaminsky said. "I don't think President Kennedy or President Johnson received any more honest reports than President Nixon. Maybe that's why we've been in Vietnam for 10 years. Anyone ever stationed in Vietnam has always assured the President in office that things were going well. The only people who didn't believe the reports were those who read the newspaper and watched the war on television."

"The problem with our Presidents is that they refused to believe what they read in the newspaper because the secret reports they received said the exact opposite."

"Then what you're saying, Kaminsky, is that the people who read the newspapers knew more about what was going on in Indochina than the Presidents of the United States?"

"Of course. You must remember that when you're President you trust people who agree with you more than people who disagree with you. Why would a President believe a news story that makes his policy look bad?"

"He wouldn't," I admitted. "Particularly during an election year. But if we can't believe the President knows more than we do, then it takes all the fun out of having a President. I still believe the President has lots of secrets that he isn't telling us."

"Possibly," Kaminsky said. "But you must keep in mind that the fact something is secret doesn't necessarily make it true, and the fact that something is true doesn't necessarily make it secret."

Kaminsky seemed pleased with himself. "Would you like to buy me another drink?"

"No," I replied.

© 1972, Los Angeles Times

How We Sank into Vietnam

Joseph Buttinger

One of the most puzzling questions future historians will have to deal with is why the United States ever got involved in the contemporary struggle for Indochina that has been going on since 1945. Did the considerations that determined the course of American foreign policy after World War II make this involvement inevitable or could it have been avoided in spite of the tensions that arose after 1945 between the West and the so-called Communist bloc? On this point, opinions will probably always remain divided, but those who believe that no other course could have been chosen without damage to the West or the United States would do well to consider the following:

(1) no Indochina war would have taken place if France had not insisted on reestablishing its control over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos after these countries had gained independence following the Japanese surrender in 1945;

(2) it is questionable that the United States would ever have reached the point of even considering intervention in Vietnamese affairs, if it had refused from the beginning to support the reestablishment of French rule in Indochina.

It is indeed one of the important conclusions of the Pentagon Papers "that the Truman Administration's decision to give military aid to France in her colonial war against the Communist-led Vietminh 'directly involved' the United States in Vietnam and 'set' the course of American policy."¹

Yet this decision was made only in 1950, after the victory of Communism in China and the recognition of Ho Chi Minh's regime by the Soviet Union and Communist China. It would never have come about had it not been preceded by the decision made by the victorious Allies at the Potsdam Conference of July 17 to August 2, 1945, which gave the French not only a free hand but also Allied support for the reconquest of Indochina. This Potsdam decision, supported only by the British under both Churchill and Attlee, might not have been taken if President

Roosevelt had still been alive. It was opposed by Nationalist China under Chiang Kai-shek and certainly not favored by Stalin. Vigorous American opposition to it would probably have led to the acceptance of Roosevelt's concept of a United Nations Trusteeship for French Indochina as a first step toward full independence.

Surprisingly on this crucial point the conclusion of the Pentagon Papers is that Roosevelt "never made up his mind whether to support the French desire to reclaim their Indochinese colonies from the Japanese at the end of the war."² In view of the forceful statements Roosevelt made against the return of the French to Indochina to his Secretary of State Cordell Hull and to his son Elliot, as reported in their memoirs,³ this conclusion must be regarded as erroneous.

There has been much speculation about the question whether American massive military intervention in Vietnam might not have been avoided if President Kennedy had been alive. It is unlikely that this question will ever be answered with any degree of certainty. But it is probable that Vietnam after 1945 would have experienced a period of peaceful evolution toward independence, under a regime not unlike that of Tito's Yugoslavia, if Roosevelt had lived and succeeded in imposing his anticolonial solution for Indochina. Nor is it far-fetched to assume that Roosevelt would not have disregarded the appeals of Ho Chi Minh, in at least eight letters to Washington in 1945-46 for United States and United Nations intervention against French colonialism.⁴ "There is no record . . . that any of these appeals were answered."⁵ Not until publication of the Pentagon Papers did the American public hear of the existence of these letters.

Yet the Truman administration's policy toward Vietnam remained ambivalent for at least the first three years of the Indochina war. On the one hand, the U.S. "fully recognized France's sovereign position," as Secretary of State George Marshall said in a still secret State Department cablegram sent to the U.S. Embassy in Paris; on the other hand,

STATINTL